

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PARIS 02007 01 OF 02 201928Z
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8973
INFO AMCONSUL BORDEAUX
AMCONSUL LYON
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AMCONSUL MARTINIQUE
AMCONSUL NICE
AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: FR, PINT,
SUBJECT: JACQUES CHIRAC DECLARES HIS CANDIDACY FOR MAYOR
OF PARIS

SUMMARY: IN A SURPRISE MOVE THAT HAS CAUGHT PARIS POLITICAL CIRCLES OFF GUARD, FORMER PRIME MINISTER JACQUES CHIRAC ANNOUNCED ON JANUARY 19 THAT HE WOULD RUN FOR MAYOR OF PARIS. THOUGH THERE ARE A NUMBER OF RISKS INHERENT IN HIS BOLD MOVE -- SOMETHING TYPICAL OF CHIRAC'S STYLE -- HE HAS FOR THE MOMENT TAKEN THE INITIATIVE AWAY FROM GISCARD. THIS ACT ON CHIRAC'S PART MUST BE VIEWED MAINLY IN THE CONTEXT OF HIS LONG-TERM POLITICAL INTERESTS. END SUMMARY.

1. BACKGROUND: THE INITIAL DASH OF THE RPR HAD BEEN WEARING OFF IN RECENT WEEKS, AND WHILE IT WOULD BE INACCURATE TO SAY THAT THERE WAS A MALAISE AT RPR HEADQUARTERS.
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PAGE 02 PARIS 02007 01 OF 02 201928Z

TERS IN THE TOUR MONTPARNASSE, THE SITUATION WAS FAR FROM HAPPY AS CONCERNS THE POLITICAL SITUATION OF THE MAJORITY IN PARIS. THOUGH THE RPR CURRENTLY HOLDS MORE SEATS THAN ANY OTHER SINGLE PARTY ON THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL (34 OUT OF 90), IT WAS APPARENT TO ALL OBSERVERS THAT THEY STOOD TO DECLINE IN THE FORTHCOMING ELECTION. D'ORNANO'S DECLARATION OF HIS CANDIDACY IN NOVEMBER 1976 (PARIS

33814), WAS TAKEN BY THE RPR AS ONE MORE PROOF THAT THE PRESIDENT AND/OR HIS ENTOURAGE WERE OUT TO GET THE GAULLISTS. THEN CAME THE ANNOUNCEMENTS OF D'ORNANO'S LISTS, WITH D'ORNANO HIMSELF RUNNING AGAINST BERNARD LAFAY, AN INCUMBANT, LONG-IMPLANTED RPR MUNICIPAL COUNSELOR AND DEPUTY FROM THE L7TH ARRONDISSEMENT IN PARIS.

2. IN FACT MANY BELIEVED THAT D'ORNANO STOOD A REASONABLY DECENT CHANCE NOT ONLY OF DEFEATING LAFAY BUT ALSO OF BEING CONSEQUENTLY ELECTED MAYOR. FAR FROM HURTING THE MAJORITY'S CHANCES IN PARIS, FIRST ROUNDS COULD EVEN IMPROVE ITS POSITION IN MOST DISTRICTS. THOUGH CHIRAC OFFICIALLY REQUESTED HIS MEETING WITH BARRE ONLY AFTER THE PRESIDENT'S TELEVISED ADDRESS OF JANUARY L7, THERE HAD BEEN TALK FOR SOME TIME THAT HE WOULD BE SEEING BARRE FOR THE SECOND TIME VERY SOON. THERE IS ALSO THE FACT THAT THE RPR ITSELF BROUGHT OUT ITS OWN LIST OF CANDIDATES ON THE 11TH OF JANUARY. WITH BOTH LISTS THUS AVAILABLE FOR SCRUTINY, IT BECAME APPARENT THAT D'ORNANO WAS CONFRONTING THE RPR IN THOSE AREAS WHERE HE BELIEVED THE RPR INCUMBANT STOOD A GOOD CHANCE OF LOSING. ON THE OTHER HAND, IN SUCH DISTRICTS AS THE 7TH, 10TH AND 14TH, WHERE FIRST ROUNDS WOULD HURT THE MAJORITY'S CHANCES OF WINNING AT ALL, D'ORNANO POINTEDLY ABSTAINED FROM RUNNING A COUNTERLIST. GISCARD HIMSELF IN HIS JANUARY 17TH PRESS CONFERENCE (PARIS 01697), SOMEWHAT OPENED THE DOOR TO CHIRAC'S ANNOUNCEMENT BY: NOT ENDORSING IR CANDIDATE D'ORNANO BY NAME; BY STRESSING THE ADVANTAGES OF PLURALISM WITHIN THE MAJORITY; BY PLACING HIMSELF ABOVE THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 PARIS 02007 01 OF 02 201928Z

POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE COMING POLITICAL FRAY; AND BY NOT TAKING NOTE OF THE INCREASINGLY POLITICAL NATURE OF MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS.

3. CHIRAC'S STATEMENT: CHIRAC'S STATEMENT TO THE PRESS WAS MADE NOT AS HE LEFT THE MATIGNON AFTER HIS MEETING WITH BARRE, BUT AT HIS PRIVATE OFFICE ON THE PLACE BOURBON, PERHAPS IN AN ATTEMPT TO LESSEN THE BLOW TO VGE AND COMPANY. THOUGH HE DECLARED HIMSELF AS AVAILABLE AT "THE HEAD OF ALL THOSE WHO ARE UNITED IN LEADING THE SAME BATTLE," AGAINST COLLECTIVISM, THERE WAS LITTLE RISK THAT THFFIRST MAYOR OF PARIS WOULD BE A MEMBER OF THE OPPOSITION (WHOSE LISTS ARE NOT YET KNOWN). IN THE LAST (1971) MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS ONLY 29 OPPOSITION COUNSELORS WERE VOTED IN OUT OF A TOTAL OF 90 SEATS. THE CAPITAL CITY VOTED HEAVILY IN FAVOR OF GISCARD IN THE 1974 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, AND WHILE SOME SECTORS OF THE CITY HAVE VEERED TO THE LEFT, A SIMPLE MAJORITY OF THE POPULATION IS STILL FIRMLY IN THE RPR/IR/CENTRIST

CAMP. CHIRAC DID TAKE THE TROUBLE IN HIS STATEMENT TO
UNDERScore UNEQUIVOCAL SUPPORT FOR THE BARRE PLAN, BUT

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PAGE 01 PARIS 02007 02 OF 02 201925Z
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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 02 OF 02 PARIS 02007

THIS IS SMALL RECOMPENSE FOR HIS CANDIDACY.

4. WHY DID HE DO IT?: CHIRAC'S SURPRISE MOVE (NOT EVEN
THE WILDEST RUMOR MILL IN PARIS HAD HINTED AT HIS NAME)
MAY BE EXPLAINED ON TWO GROUNDS. FIRST, BY PRESENTING
HIMSELF HE RECONCILES DIFFERENCES OF STRATEGY BETWEEN THE
RPR PARIS-MAJORITE GROUP AT THE HOTEL DE VILLE AND THE
HIERARCHY OF STRATEGISTS AT THE TOUR MONTPARNASSE. WE
CAN BE RELATIVELY SURE HE WILL DO HIS BEST TO FORESTALL
BIG GUNS LIKE DE LA MALENE AND PIERRE BAS LOSING THEIR
SEATS. SECONDLY, HAVING BEEN OUT OF THE HEADLINES FOR
AWHILE -- AND WITH TALK STARTING OF A LOSS OF MOMENTUM IN
THE NEW MOVEMENT -- CHIRAC PUTS HIMSELF AND THE RPR BACK
IN THE HEADLINES, WHICH IS WHERE HE FEELS HE MUST STAY IN
ORDER TO BE READY FOR HIS ELYSEE CAMPAIGN, WHENEVER IT
SHOULD COME ABOUT. IT IS A WELL KNOWN FACT THAT THE
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PAGE 02 PARIS 02007 02 OF 02 201925Z

TOWN HALL WILL PROVIDE AN EXCELLENT BASE FROM WHICH CHIRAC CAN KEEP HIMSELF IN THE HEADLINES; WITH A LARGE AND DEVOTED STAFF AT HIS DISPOSAL, HE WILL STILL BE ABLE TO DEVOTE TIME TO HIS LEGISLATIVE AND POLITICAL PARTY DUTIES.

5. WHAT IF ...: CHIRAC HAS PUT THE PRESIDENT AND D'ORNANO IN AN AWKWARD POSITION AND THE BLOW TO THE PRESTIGE OF BOTH, SHOULD CHIRAC WIN, COULD HURT FOR A LONG TIME TO COME. IT IS STILL POSSIBLE OF COURSE, THAT CHIRAC WIN A MUNICIPAL COUNCIL SEAT ON HIS LIST BUT FAIL TO BE ELECTED MAYOR OF PARIS BY THE COUNCIL. THIS COULD OCCUR IF MORE INDEPENDENT REPUBLICAN COUNSELORS WERE VOTED IN THAN RPR COUNSELORS (HIGHLY DOUBTFUL) OR IF SOME UNION OF THE LEFT COUNSELORS CHOSE WHAT THEY SEE TO BE THE LESSER OF TWO EVILS AND VOTED FOR A MAJORITY - BUT NON-RPR CANDIDATE (UNLIKELY). UNDOUBTEDLY THERE WILL BE CERTAIN REVISIONS IN THE LISTS OF BOTH MEN AS A RESULT OF CHIRAC'S MOVE. FINALLY, CHIRAC IS IN THE UNIQUE POSITION OF BEING A DEPUTY FROM THE CORREZE DEPARTMENT YET RUNNING FOR THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL OF AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT CITY (IN FACT, HE HAS ALSO BEEN COUNSELOR MUNICIPALE FROM THE VILLAGE OF SAINTE-FEREOLE SINCE 1965). THOUGH D'ORNANO IS IN THE SAME POSITION, PEOPLE ARE ALREADY ASKING THEMSELVES WHERE THE FORMER PRIME MINISTER'S REAL INTERESTS LIE. THE ANSWER IS NOT DIFFICULT: THEY LIE IN HIS OWN POLITICAL FUTURE. HIS RUNNING FOR MAYOR OF PARIS, WHERE THE MAJORITY IS IN A GOOD POSITION TO WIN, IS GRATUITOUS. CHIRAC HIMSELF IS TO HOLD A SECOND PRESS CONFERENCE ON THE AFTERNOON OF JANUARY 20TH. FURTHER EMBASSY ANALYSIS TO FOLLOW.
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